

The Strategic Defence Initiative and the Atlantic Alliance in the 1980s

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Abstract:

This chapter introduces the topic and themes of the volume. While existing literature on the SDI has largely focused on its influence on superpower relations during the final years of the Cold War, this chapter explores the impact it had on transatlantic relations, specifically with NATO allies. President Reagan's SDI speech of March 1983, and the invitation by Secretary of Defense Weinberger two years later for NATO allies to formally join the SDI research programme, provoked tensions within the Alliance during an already febrile period of the Cold War. The chapter explains the responses of eight different NATO governments to the American initiative, and why some opted to join the SDI and why others refused. It also outlines the responses to the SDI among peace organisations, civil society, and the commentariat, highlighting the impact of Star Wars across society. It then considers why, having placed significant strains on relations between the US and its Allies, the SDI ultimately did not lead to an even deeper crisis within NATO in the 1980s.

Shortly after leaving office, Ronald Reagan claimed that the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), an anti-missile shield he first proposed in 1983 as a means of protecting the United States from nuclear attack, was 'the single most important reason, on the United States' side, for the historical breakthroughs that were to occur during the next five years in the quest for peace and a better relationship with the Soviet Union'.¹ This assessment was echoed by Margaret Thatcher after the collapse of the USSR, as she asserted that, 'looking back, it is now clear to me that Ronald Reagan's original decision on SDI was the single most important of his presidency'.² Few would have made such claims when Reagan first adumbrated the SDI in March 1983. Indeed, Thatcher's Foreign Secretary, Geoffrey Howe, publicly derided the initiative as 'a new Maginot Line of the twenty-first century', and the term 'Star Wars' was used ubiquitously and unflatteringly to refer to the seemingly fanciful plan.³ Such misgivings about the American project were widely shared across NATO capitals in the 1980s, but to date these international responses to the SDI have been relatively unexplored by historians. This volume uses new archival sources and innovative methodological approaches to provide a rigorous study of allied reactions to the Strategic Defence Initiative.

There is a considerable literature on the SDI, with historiographical debates tending to focus on how far the SDI contributed to the end of the Cold War.⁴ Some historians have argued that the SDI constituted an insurmountable economic and technological challenge to the Soviet Union: unable to produce an SDI of their own, yet equally unwilling to leave themselves undefended, the initiative forced Gorbachev to the negotiating table. In this interpretation, the SDI was pivotal in bringing about the INF Treaty of December 1987 and ultimately the end of

¹ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Threshold, 1990), 548.

² Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years* (London: Harper, 1993), 463.

³ 'Britain questions "Star Wars" plan', 16 March 1985, *The New York Times*. On the use of the term 'Star Wars', see Anette Stimmer, 'Star Wars or Strategic Defence Initiative: what's in a name?', *Journal of Global Security Studies*, vol.4, 4 (October 2019), pp 430-447.

⁴ The best history of the SDI on the American side remains Frances FitzGerald's *Way Out There in The Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War* (Simon and Schuster, 2001).

the Cold War itself.⁵ Others have advanced the more nuanced argument that while the SDI had some influence on Soviet policies, it was clearly a secondary factor in bringing about arms control breakthroughs and the end of the Cold War.⁶ Indeed, the SDI proved to be an insuperable barrier that scuppered a possible arms control agreement between Reagan and Gorbachev at the 1986 Reykjavik Summit.⁷ Meanwhile, one recent study of the SDI has advanced a reinterpretation of the end of the Cold War by arguing that Reagan pursued an ultimately unsuccessful grand strategy of ‘cocreating’ a new world order based on superpower cooperation and the elimination of nuclear weapons precisely by sharing SDI technology with Moscow.⁸

For all the research published on the influence of Star Wars on superpower relations, its impact on transatlantic relations within NATO has been relatively neglected. The main book-length study of Western European responses to the SDI remains an edited volume from 1987, written by political scientists without access to the relevant archives.⁹ While some more recent chapter-length studies have considered the responses of NATO governments, these inevitably remain brief and are not based on the wide range of archival materials now available to researchers.¹⁰ Histories of NATO have similarly tended to overlook the SDI.¹¹

This volume breaks new ground in three important respects. The chapters in this volume are based on rigorous archival research with newly declassified documents, many consulted for the first time specifically for this volume. This allows us to re-evaluate earlier accounts which relied on published sources, memoirs, and newspapers. While restrictions in some national archives continue to pose obstacles to historical research, many of the authors have successfully used a multi-archival approach, meticulously drawing on international archives to fill in gaps left in specific national collections and thereby providing new insights.

⁵ See, for example, Peter Schweizer, *Victory: The Reagan Administration's Secret Strategy That Hastened the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994) and Mira Duric, *The Strategic Defence Initiative: US Policy and the Soviet Union* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003).

⁶ Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Raymond Garthoff, ‘The US Role in Winding Down the Cold War, 1980-1990’ in *The Last Decade of the Cold War: From Conflict Escalation to Conflict Transformation*, ed. Olav Njølstad (London: Routledge, 2004). Pavel Podvig has argued that SDI’s influence on Soviet policymaking in particular was limited: Podvig, ‘Did Star Wars Help End the Cold War? Soviet Response to the SDI Program’, *Sciences & Global Security*, 25:1, 2017, 3-27.

⁷ Jonathan Hunt and David Reynolds, ‘Geneva, Reykjavik, Washington, and Moscow, 1985-8’ in Kristina Spohr and David Reynolds, *Transcending the Cold War: Summits, Statecraft, and the Dissolution of Bipolarity in Europe, 1970-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 151-179, especially 160-165.

⁸ Ralph Diel, *The Strategic Defence Initiative. Ronald Reagan, NATO Europe, and the Nuclear Space Talks, 1981-1988* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018). James Graham Wilson, by contrast, argues compellingly that ‘grand strategies did not shape the end of the Cold War’ in his excellent *The Triumph of Improvisation: Gorbachev's Adaptability, Reagan's Engagement, and the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 198.

⁹ Hans Günter Brauch (ed.), *Star Wars and European Defence: Implications for Europe* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987). Specific chapters consider reactions in the UK, France, West Germany, and the Benelux.

¹⁰ Sean Kalic, ‘Reagan's SDI Announcement and the European Reaction: Diplomacy in the Last Decade of the Cold War’ in *The Crisis of Détente in Europe: From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985*, ed. Leopoldo Nuti (London: Routledge, 2009), 99-109; Philipp Gassert, ‘Did Transatlantic Drift Help European Integration? The Euromissiles Crisis, the Strategic Defense Initiative, and the Quest for Political Cooperation’ in *European Integration and the Atlantic Community in the 1980s*, eds Kiran Klaus Patel and Kenneth Weisbrode (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 154-176, specifically 171-175.

¹¹ No mention of the SDI is included in histories of NATO including Lawrence Kaplan, *The Long Entanglement: NATO's First Fifty Years* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999) and Timothy Andrews Sayle, *Enduring Alliance: A History of NATO and the Postwar Global Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019). Kaplan's *NATO Divided, NATO United: The Evolution of an Alliance* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004) includes a brief discussion of the SDI, pp. 95-96.

This book also makes an important contribution in its geographical scope. Existing accounts of ‘European’ responses tend to limit themselves to two or three countries, namely Britain, West Germany, and France.¹² This volume reassesses not only these ‘big three’ of European NATO member states, but examines the responses of eight NATO governments to the American initiative. By looking at a much more extensive array of allies – large and small, European and North American – as well as Soviet assessments of the SDI, this volume offers the most comprehensive evaluation to date of international responses to Star Wars.

Finally, in terms of methodology, this book goes beyond the usual top-down approach to Cold War political history which focuses on national leaders and policymakers by extending the analysis to the responses of civil society and peace movements on both sides of the Atlantic. Existing literature on peace and anti-nuclear activism in NATO countries tends to focus on the issue of the ‘Euromissiles’. As a result, there are relatively few accounts of peace activism covering the period after the ‘Hot Autumn’ of 1983 and the beginning of INF deployment in Europe towards the end of that year.¹³ Even Lawrence Wittner’s magisterial three-volume study of the nuclear disarmament movement only mentions in passing that peace movements in some European countries opposed Star Wars.¹⁴ By using new archival sources to analyse how anti-nuclear groups responded to the SDI, this volume highlights that they remained important actors well into the mid-1980s, and opens up avenues for further research. It also offers a novel discussion of the changing discourse around the SDI and nuclear weapons in the final years of the Cold War.¹⁵

By adopting these innovative approaches, this volume deepens our understanding of responses to Star Wars within NATO. However, it does not purport to offer a definitive international history of the SDI. The US invited countries outside of NATO – notably Israel, Japan, and Australia – to participate in the SDI as well, but these remain beyond the scope of this volume.¹⁶ Further research on Eastern European and Chinese responses to the SDI remains to be done, for example, as does the role of Star Wars in peace movements and civil society in other NATO countries. Nevertheless, this book provides the most thorough account to date of responses to the SDI across NATO and its impact on transatlantic relations, and we hope it stimulates further research into the international dimensions of the SDI.

¹² This is the case with the publications by Brauch, Kalic, and Gassert above. See also Edoardo Andreoni’s excellent *Ronald Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative and Transatlantic Relations, 1983-1986* (Unpublished DPhil thesis: Cambridge, 2017).

¹³ On peace activism in Europe and INF deployment, a good starting point is Leopoldo Nuti, Frédéric Bozo, Marie-Pierre Rey and Bernd Rother (eds), *The Euromissile Crisis and the End of the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); Eckart Conze, Martin Klimke and Jeremy Varon, *Nuclear Threats, Nuclear Fear and the Cold War of the 1980s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). One recent volume that includes studies of peace groups after INF deployment, specifically their response to the 1987 INF Treaty, is Philipp Gassert, Tim Geiger and Hermann Wentker (eds), *The INF Treaty of 1987: A Reappraisal* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020).

¹⁴ Lawrence Wittner, *The Struggle Against The Bomb. Volume Three: Toward Nuclear Abolition, 1971 to the Present* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 336-7. Wittner does discuss opposition to the SDI within the United States itself, but not elsewhere across NATO. See Wittner 341-46.

¹⁵ On public discourse on the SDI in the US, see William Knoblauch, ‘Selling “Star Wars” in American Mass Media’ in Henrik G. Bastiansen, Martin Klimke and Rolf Werenskjöld (eds), *Media and the Cold War in the 1980s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2019), 19-42.

¹⁶ For a recent evaluation of Israel and the SDI, see Or Rabinowitz, ‘“Arrow” Mythology Revisited: The Curious Case of the Reagan Administration, Israel and SDI Cooperation’, *International History Review*, published online March 2021, DOI: [10.1080/07075332.2021.1883094](https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2021.1883094) See also Peter J. Westwick, ‘The International History of the Strategic Defense Initiative: American Influence and Economic Competition in the Late Cold War’, *Centaurus* 52:4, November 2010, 338-351.

Star Wars and Transatlantic Relations in the 1980s

Although successive American administrations in the 1960s and 1970s had explored ballistic missile defence (BMD), the SDI was unveiled rather unexpectedly by President Reagan in a televised address on 23 March 1983.¹⁷ Crucially, he suggested that the SDI offered a means of transcending the strategy of deterrence and mutually assured destruction (MAD): ‘What if free people could live secure in the knowledge... that we could intercept and destroy strategic ballistic missiles before they reached our own soil or that of our allies?’ Acknowledging that such a defensive system ‘will take years, probably decades’, he called on the American scientific community ‘to turn their great talents now to the cause of mankind and world peace, to give us the means of rendering these nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete’.¹⁸

Reagan’s address came during a period of heightened tensions between the US and its NATO allies, on the one hand, and the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, on the other, often referred to as the ‘Second Cold War’. With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 generally seen as marking the final nail in the coffin of détente, the election of Ronald Reagan in November 1980 added to an already febrile international environment.¹⁹ As President, Reagan pursued a build-up of the American nuclear arsenal and frequently used strident rhetoric against the Soviet Union. Indeed, just two weeks before unveiling his plans for the SDI, Reagan infamously denounced the USSR as ‘the evil empire’ in a speech to the National Association of Evangelicals, prompting some journalists flippantly to refer to Reagan’s ‘Darth Vader speech’. With the SDI address of 23 March, American politicians and journalists immediately likened the initiative to a fantastical scheme from the Star Wars films. The morning after Reagan’s speech, the *Washington Post* quoted Democratic Senator Ted Kennedy dismissing the initiative as ‘misleading Red-scare tactics and reckless Star Wars schemes’. The term ‘Star Wars’, which implied that the Hollywood actor-turned-President was pursuing a fanciful project better suited to a sci-fi film, quickly caught on and became synonymous with the SDI, much to Reagan’s exasperation.²⁰

For most observers in NATO capitals, Reagan’s address did not prompt much serious discussion of the proposed ‘Strategic Defence Initiative’, and no immediate policy response was formulated. In March 1983, the looming deployment of Cruise and Pershing II missiles in Western Europe, scheduled to begin that autumn, remained the focus of governments and anti-nuclear campaigners alike. With the first of these ‘Euromissiles’ successfully deployed from autumn 1983, and the formal establishment of the SDI Organisation within the Pentagon in spring 1984, it became clear that Star Wars would remain on Washington’s agenda and NATO

¹⁷ On earlier BMD projects, see James Cameron, *The Double Game: The Demise of America’s First Missile Defense System and the Rise of Strategic Arms Limitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). See also the discussion of the predecessors to the SDI in James Graham Wilson’s chapter in this volume.

¹⁸ ‘Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security’, 23 March 1983, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-nation-defense-and-national-security>

¹⁹ For a recent study of how dialogue between the superpowers nevertheless continued during this tense period, see Simon Miles, *Engaging the Evil Empire: Washington, Moscow, and the Beginning of the End of the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

²⁰ Kennedy was quoted in a *Washington Post* article by Lou Cannon, ‘President Seeks Futuristic Defense Against Missiles’, 24 March 1983. The third Star Wars film, ‘Return of the Jedi’, was released in cinemas that spring and became the highest grossing film of 1983. Frances Fitzgerald observes that the SDI resembled a number of fictional schemes from Hollywood movies, including the 1940 film *Murder in the Air* starring none other than Ronald Reagan. See Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue*, 22-23.

governments began to consider the SDI more seriously. Reagan's landslide re-election in November 1984 further highlighted that the SDI would endure. Already in December 1984, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher discussed her concerns over the SDI with Reagan at Camp David, where the President agreed with a set of four points advanced by Thatcher which went some way in assuaging Britain's (and other allies') apprehensions.²¹

By early 1985, it appeared that the SDI would remain purely a research programme, and one carried out solely by the United States in American laboratories. With Reagan himself admitting that it could take decades to develop effective defensive systems under the SDI, the issue was not seen as especially pressing. This changed dramatically in March 1985 when, in the margins of a NATO Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) meeting in Luxembourg, American Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger issued his NATO counterparts an unexpected invitation to participate directly in the SDI research programme. Moreover, the surprise request came with a demand that governments respond within 60 days, which was denounced in several NATO capitals as an ultimatum. Despite the strained atmosphere at the Luxembourg NPG, the NATO defence ministers managed to paper over their differences in their communiqué, which affirmed that:

We support the United States research programme into these technologies [...] This research, conducted within the terms of the ABM Treaty, is in NATO's security interest and should continue. In this context, we welcome the United States invitation for Allies to consider participation in the research programme.²²

While few NATO governments responded definitively within the 60-day timeframe – which Weinberger finally withdrew in the face of Allied criticism – it nevertheless forced NATO governments to urgently confront the question of whether and in what form to participate in the SDI. Furthermore, the March 1985 invitation placed the SDI firmly on the radar of the public across NATO, spurring public debates and prompting anti-nuclear organisations to mobilise against government participation in Star Wars.

With the qualified public support agreed by NATO allies in the Luxembourg NPG communiqué, the Reagan Administration was able to conclude that 'our allies understand the military context in which the Strategic Defense Initiative was established and support the SDI research program'.²³ Yet this public show of allied solidarity belied significant reservations held by many NATO governments about the SDI, and the strain this placed on relations between the United States and its Allies during an already tense period. Neither the announcement of the SDI in March 1983 nor the invitation almost exactly two years later for NATO governments to formally join the research programme was preceded by any meaningful consultation with NATO allies. The Reagan years saw a number of important divergences and disagreements between the United States and its NATO allies, and the SDI posed a further

²¹ Specifically, Reagan affirmed that the US was not seeking strategic superiority with the SDI, that the deployment of any SDI-related systems would be the subject of international negotiation, that the aim of the SDI was to enhance deterrence, and that arms control remained the aim of East-West negotiations. 'Record of a meeting between the Prime Minister and President Reagan at Camp David on 22 December 1984 at 1030 Hours', <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/document/22548-document-01-thatcher-reagan-memcon-december-10>

²² 'NATO Nuclear Planning Group Final Communiqué', 27 March 1985, https://archives.nato.int/uploads/r/null/1/4/140563/PRESS_RELEASE_M_NPG_1_85_5_ENG.pdf

²³ National Security Decision Directive Number 172, 30 May 1985, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/public/archives/reference/scanned-nsdds/nsdd172.pdf>

challenge to transatlantic relations.²⁴ Beyond allied annoyance at unilateral American actions – hardly unique to the Reagan Administration – the SDI raised a number of specific concerns among the allies which informed their response to the US project. Indeed, having spent years facing down burgeoning peace movements and insisting upon the necessity of INF deployment to strengthen deterrence and maintain peace, many NATO governments questioned how far the SDI and Reagan’s stated aim of making the Euromissiles and other nuclear weapons ‘impotent and obsolete’ risked undermining their position on INF deployment and exposing them to further political challenges domestically. The reactions to the SDI on both sides of the Atlantic are analysed in this volume.

This book is divided into four sections. The first consists of a pair of chapters that consider the SDI from the perspective of the superpowers. James Graham Wilson explains President Reagan’s motivations for pursuing the Strategic Defence Initiative and the impact the initiative had on superpower relations and the end of the Cold War. Based on a thorough analysis of the American archives, Wilson concludes that the SDI made a positive contribution to bringing about the INF and START treaties, or at least did not impede such arms control breakthroughs. Svetlana Savranskaya provides a contrasting view based on her detailed reading of the Soviet archives. Her chapter traces the evolution of Moscow’s perceptions of the SDI, from initial fears that it posed an existential threat to the Soviet Union to ultimately dismissing Star Wars as unfeasible and innocuous. She concludes that the SDI in fact slowed down the process of disarmament and delayed the end of the Cold War. These two rich chapters deepen our understanding and advance the debate over the broader importance of the SDI for superpower relations and the end of the Cold War.

Following this discussion of the superpowers, parts two and three of the volume focus on the responses of eight different NATO governments, and the impact of the SDI on transatlantic relations in the 1980s. Part two deals with countries which ultimately opted to join the SDI research programme. In his study of the United Kingdom, Edoardo Andreoni traces the evolution of the Thatcher government’s views on the SDI. Despite significant differences of opinion within the Cabinet, Thatcher’s policy of cooperating with the US on the SDI to try to influence its development prevailed. While Thatcher successfully shaped some aspects of the SDI at her meeting with Reagan at Camp David in December 1984, British hopes for lucrative contracts from the SDI proved to be largely elusive. Andreas Lutsch’s chapter examines the response of the Federal Republic of Germany’s government to the SDI. He shows how Bonn balanced the competing interests of *Westbindung* and preserving close relations with the US, including American nuclear protection for the FRG, with the aim of maintaining East-West stability. This ultimately led Chancellor Kohl to endorse the SDI as a means of influencing its development, particularly with a view to diminish any East-West destabilisation that the SDI might cause. In her chapter on Italy, Marilena Gala examines the Italian government’s evolving position on the SDI. She highlights the extent to which Rome sought to coordinate its response with its European partners, and how the Craxi government saw participation in the SDI research programme as a means of both gaining access to high technologies and influencing the American programme. While these three chapters astutely detail the differences of opinion within these governments, and how their support for the SDI was not unconditional, they together provide a nuanced account of why these allies sought to be involved with Reagan’s initiative. Taken together, these chapters underscore how certain key considerations – the hope

²⁴ See N. Piers Ludlow, ‘The Unnoticed Apogee of Atlanticism? U.S.-Western European Relations during the Early Reagan Era’ in Kiran Klaus Patel and Kenneth Weisbrode (eds), *European Integration and the Atlantic Community*, 17-38.

of exerting influence on a potentially disruptive American initiative, the prospect of gaining access to sensitive high technologies and profitable contracts – informed all three positive decisions.²⁵

Part three of the volume adopts a similar approach to evaluate the responses of NATO governments which ultimately rejected Weinberger's March 1985 invitation to join the SDI research programme. In her chapter on France, Ilaria Parisi explains how Mitterrand's refusal to join the SDI was informed by the desire to maintain French and European independence both in strategic and technological terms. The SDI threatened the strategic stability provided by deterrence and posed specific problems for the two European Nuclear Weapons States. Whereas the UK addressed this by seeking close cooperation with Washington in the hopes of being able to influence the SDI, France instead rejected the SDI outright. Regarding technology, France again deviated from the governments discussed in part two, concluding that rather than participating in the SDI in order to gain access to American high technologies, France and Europe should launch their own research programme, EUREKA, to preclude enduring technological dependence on the US.²⁶ While the French reaction amounted to a fundamental rejection of the SDI concept, the Canadian and Dutch governments instead responded with a 'polite no', as Luc-André Brunet and Ruud van Dijk demonstrate in their respective chapters. In Canada's case, Ottawa concluded that Canadian involvement in the SDI would bring no considerable economic or technological advantages to Canada and would likely stoke anti-Americanism at home. As such, Prime Minister Mulroney's carefully managed refusal to join the SDI programme was politically useful, as it allowed him to present himself domestically as a defender of Canadian sovereignty, which in turn enabled him to better pursue his priority in bilateral relations with Washington, namely free trade talks that would deepen economic ties with the US. The Netherlands, for its part, similarly concluded that economic, technological, or even diplomatic advantages of joining the SDI research programme were trifling, and that declining to join 'without prejudice' posed minimal strains on relations with Washington. The Hague also sought a coordinated Western European response to the SDI and concluded that to avoid a technological divide between the United States and Europe, the latter would need to develop further its own high-tech capabilities outside of the SDI. Turning to NATO's northern flank, Jakob Linnet Schmidt examines the reactions of both the Danish and the Norwegian governments to the SDI. The coalition governments in both countries viewed the SDI negatively and feared it could prompt a new arms race. The election of a social democratic-led government in Oslo and the exceptional parliamentary situation in Copenhagen led to a shift away from 'low-voiced scepticism' to both countries adding footnotes to NATO communiqués pertaining to the SDI to express their disagreement with the initiative.²⁷ Taken together, these chapters underline how the negative responses to the invitation to participate in the SDI research programme were the result of a wide range of assessments and motivations

²⁵ For a recent study on the role of technology in Britain's decision-making, see Anthony Eames, 'A "Corruption of British Sciences?": The Strategic Defense Initiative and British Technology Policy', *Technology and Culture* 62:3 (2021), 812-838.

²⁶ EUREKA must also be understood in the context of the *relance* of European integration of the mid-1980s, marked by the revival of the Western European Union in 1984 and the adoption of the Single European Act two years later. See Antonio Varsori, 'The Relaunching of Europe in the Mid-1980s' in Patel and Weisbrode (eds), *European Integration and the Atlantic Community*, 226-242.

²⁷ 'Footnoting' was regularly used by Denmark and Greece on the question of INF deployment in the early 1980s; while Norway refrained from 'footnoting' over INF, the new government did so in 1986 over the SDI. On 'footnoting', see Effie Pedaliu, "'Footnotes' as an Expression of Distrust? The United States and the NATO "Flanks" in the Last Two Decades of the Cold War' in Martin Klimke, Reinhild Kreis and Christian Ostermann (eds), *Trust, but Verify: The Politics of Uncertainty and the Transformation of the Cold War Order, 1969-1991* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 237-258.

among different NATO allies. Opposition to joining the SDI research programme brought together not only the ‘usual suspects’ of member states such as Denmark and Greece, whose governments had expressed reservations to INF deployment, and France, with its independent foreign and defence policies within NATO, but also members that were generally supportive of American and NATO policies such as the Netherlands and Canada.²⁸

Having examined the high-level reactions of eight NATO governments, the final section of this volume focuses on civil society and public debates around Star Wars. Beginning with the United States, Angela Santese’s chapter reveals the influence of the American Nuclear Freeze Campaign on Reagan’s SDI speech and explores how the launch of Star Wars was a conscious attempt to counter the burgeoning peace movement in the US. Turning to the United Kingdom, Jonathan Hogg analyses mass media, anti-nuclear activism, and popular culture to explore the range of reactions to the SDI in British civil society. He argues that Star Wars became a useful ‘sociotechnical imaginary’ which, usefully for Britain as a nuclear power, presented the SDI as a moral and peaceful project by which technology could transcend the threat of nuclear war. Patrick Burke then analyses the anti-SDI activities of two anti-nuclear organisations: the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) in the UK and the transnational European Nuclear Disarmament (END). In addition to examining their intellectual case against the SDI, Burke explains why it proved far more challenging to mobilise public opposition to Star Wars than had been the case with protests against INF deployment. The volume concludes with Lawrence Freedman’s perceptive and engaging account of the evolution of SDI debates among the ‘commentariat’, in which his was a prominent voice. He outlines why many proponents of INF deployment were starkly critical of the SDI, based on doubts over its feasibility and suspicions that it was surreptitiously part of a first strike strategy.

In the context of highly controversial INF deployment in Western Europe, Reagan’s March 1983 Star Wars speech and especially Weinberger’s invitation two years later for allies to join its research programme added new tensions to relations between the United States and its NATO partners. Even steadfast supporters of Reagan such as Margaret Thatcher and Brian Mulroney privately fumed that Washington had been ‘offensive’, ‘insensitive’, and had ‘handled its Allies clumsily’ with the SDI.²⁹ As we have seen, the question of SDI participation also caused very public divisions among the Allies. Given the discord provoked by Star Wars, it is worth asking why such tensions did not worsen into an even deeper crisis for NATO. The Atlantic Alliance had spent the previous years almost obsessively seeking to avoid any semblance of disunity in the run-up to INF deployment. While the Euromissile Crisis was seen as serious test for the alliance, it was a test that NATO ultimately passed, with INF deployment going ahead from the autumn of 1983. The key difference between INF deployment and the SDI, however, is that the former was fundamentally an initiative devised and undertaken by the Atlantic Alliance as a whole. Indeed, the Dual Track Decision adopted by NATO in December 1979 was prompted by European, particularly West German, demands, and went ahead with five European member states agreeing to host INF.³⁰ The SDI, by contrast, was

²⁸ On Greece and NATO during this period, including the Greek government’s call to abolish the SDI, see Eirini Karamouzi and Dionysios Chourchoulis, ‘Troublemaker or peacemaker? Andreas Papandreou, the Euromissile Crisis, and the policy of peace, 1981-86’, *Cold War History* (2019) Vol. 19, No. 1, 39-61. On France and NATO in the 1980s, see Frédéric Bozo, *Mitterrand, la fin de la guerre froide et l’unification allemande* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2005).

²⁹ ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with the Prime Minister of Canada at 10 Downing Street on 30 April at 1130’, 30 April 1985, FCO 82 1626, TNA.

³⁰ See Leopoldo Nuti, ‘The Origins of the 1979 Dual-Track Decision – a Survey’ in Leopoldo Nuti, ed., *The Crisis of Détente in Europe. From Helsinki to Gorbachev, 1975-1985* (London: Routledge, 2009), 57-71, and Kristina Spohr, ‘Conflict and Cooperation in Intra-Alliance Nuclear Politics: Western Europe, the United States

unambiguously an American initiative. Only in March 1985, fully two years after the scheme was first outlined by Reagan, were allies invited to join its research programme, and despite some pressure exerted on allies to take part, a 'polite no' had no deleterious effects on relations with Washington. As such, it was never seen as a test for the Alliance the way INF deployment had been, which enabled allies to arrive at their own decisions regarding the SDI. While governments in Rome and The Hague were especially keen to arrive at a coordinated European position on the SDI through the revived WEU, such efforts came to naught, and Italy and the Netherlands ultimately arrived at opposite decisions on taking part in the SDI research programme.

One further, striking difference between INF deployment and the SDI is the contrast between the level of public opposition to the two schemes. The former rallied millions of citizens across NATO countries to protest the stationing of the Euromissiles, yet mobilisation against the SDI was on a drastically smaller scale. While Reagan remained a widely distrusted and even vilified figure among many on both sides of the Atlantic, a number of factors converged to ensure that mass opposition to the SDI was relatively subdued. As a research programme that might, after years or decades, yield systems that would then be implemented, the SDI did not seem to pose an imminent threat to European citizens. When British Foreign Secretary Geoffrey Howe disparaged the SDI as 'a new Maginot Line of the twenty-first century', this reflected the understanding that such systems would not be in place for years to come. This contrasted markedly with the impending deployment of new nuclear weapons in Western Europe, to which activists reacted with corresponding urgency. Furthermore, Star Wars lacked an obvious site of protest.³¹ Deployment sites for INF provided opponents with specific sites for different forms of protest, such as peace camps at Greenham Common, UK or Comiso, Italy, and human chains stretching from Neu Ulm to Stuttgart. Protesting against 'space weapons', by contrast, was hobbled by the absence of a palpable location where protest could be focused. Finally, as the chapters in the final section of this volume explain, the public debates around the SDI were often more complex and nuanced than the question of INF deployment, not least as Reagan's stated objective in launching the initiative was to make nuclear weapons 'impotent and obsolete' – to usher in a nuclear-free world. This made it more difficult for peace groups to articulate clear messages against Star Wars that resonated broadly.

Svetlana Savranskaya describes how the Soviet leadership initially feared that the SDI was an attempt by the United States to gain strategic superiority, undermining deterrence and mutual vulnerability, thereby posing an existential threat and thwarting a potential arms control breakthrough. Yet by 1987, Moscow had largely learned to live with the SDI. The chapters in this volume show that a similar trajectory, from anxiety to acquiescence, can be seen in many NATO capitals as well. Allied governments expressed serious reservations and exasperation about Star Wars, which they feared risked undermining deterrence and the ABM Treaty, and the initiative placed new strains on allied relations during an already difficult period. Within a year of Weinberger's invitation and the hostile responses this initially provoked among many Allies, however, the SDI had largely receded as a source of discord within the Alliance. Collectively, by analysing the reactions to the Strategic Defence Initiative across NATO – from high-level policymakers to civil society and peace organisations – the chapters that follow allow us to reassess the role of the SDI on transatlantic relations during the decisive final years of the Cold War.

and the Genesis of NATO's Dual-Track Decision, 1977-1979', *Journal of Cold War Studies* vol. 13, no. 2 (2011), 39-89.

³¹ See Susanne Schregel, *Der Atomkrieg vor der Wohnungstür. Eine Politikgeschichte der neuen Friedensbewegung in der Bundesrepublik 1970-1985* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2011).